

DDS: Succeeding Together!

March 29, 2013 edition

Vander Cherry



Vander Cherry (left), who received services from DCRSA through Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor **Shonda Pertilla**, has overcome the extraordinary challenges to employment success and has high hopes for the future – pictured here presenting to managers from the U.S. Department of the Interior and Office of Personnel Management .

Vander Cherry aspires to be a public speaker and advocate for people with disabilities. He gained momentum in the public speaking arena while participating in Project SEARCH, a school-to-career transition program at the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) during the 2010-2011 school year. DC's Department on Disability Services introduced the Project SEARCH model into the Federal government in 2009 at the U.S. Department of Labor. Vander's Project SEARCH site is co-sponsored by DC RSA and the DC Public Schools.

While gaining work experience at DOE, with job coaching support from Goodwill of Greater Washington, Vander quickly moved into a leadership role with his peers and captured the attention and hearts of managers and staff with his "can do" attitude, magnetic personality and networking ability. Vander went on to gain permanent employment at the U.S. Department of Education in 2011 due to his tenacity and positive attitude, and with the skills he developed through the program. Vander received the 2012 Yes I Can! Award from the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), an award developed to honor students with disabilities who have made extraordinary achievements.

Vander's path to employment hasn't been easy, but not always because of his disabilities. He grew up in the foster care system without consistent family support and battled against the low expectations others placed on him. He continues to inspire and advocate for people with

disabilities through speaking engagements at a national transition conference, a professional development conference for direct support professionals who work with adults with disabilities and more.

Vander is employed by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid. If you have applied for, or have, a federal student loan, Vander may have worked on your file!

ⁱ DDS: Succeeding Together! is a new initiative of the Department on Disability Services. This periodic bulletin spotlights the success stories and accomplishments of people served by DDS, through its Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) and our partners. These are triumphs that wouldn't be possible without the efforts of DDS staff and our government and community partners. DDS: Succeeding Together! enables us to recognize the talents and dedication of DDS staff, and of our partners in DC government and the service provider community -- and is proof positive that our collective hard work really does make a difference in the lives of people we serve.